CHAPTER 3:

TURKEY’S DIASPORA GOVERNANCE POLICIES AND DIASPORAS FROM TURKEY IN GERMANY: A CRITICAL READING OF THE CHANGING DYNAMICS

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Introduction

Last year over 10,000 Turkish citizens applied for asylum in Germany;¹ the year before it was approximately 8000.² Normally only one-third of these applications are approved by the German authorities. These numbers show that since the authoritarian turn in Turkey, which gained momentum after the Gezi protests in 2013 and reached its peak after the coup attempt in 2016, Turkish citizens are leaving the country despite the somewhat harsh asylum conditions that they face in Europe. Approximately 50% of those who leave seek asylum in Germany³, but there are also thousands who leave the country via golden visas or work permits. Newspapers have published alarming statistics that indicate a significant brain drain from Turkey,⁴ and those leaving the country constitute a heterogeneous crowd: there are former Turkish diplomats,⁵ academics who signed a petition calling for peace in southeastern

² Türkiye’den Almanya’ya iltica başvurularında artış sürüyor, Deutsche Welle, 14 November 2018. Accessed 30 August 2019. https://www.dw.com/tr/t%C3%8Crkiyeden-almanyaya-iltica-ba%C5%9Fvurular%C4%B1nda-art%C4%B1%C5%9F-s%C3%8Cr%C3%8Cyor/a-46299568
Turkey, students, highly skilled migrants, political activists (Kurdish and leftist) and members of the Gulen Movement, which is accused of preparing the coup attempt against the elected government. The numbers leaving Turkey clearly indicate a significant wave of migration from Turkey, the largest since the 1990s when displaced and activist Kurds left the country in record numbers.6

According to the Turkish Foreign Ministry more than five million Turkish citizens – including second-generation Turks and those of Kurdish, Assyrian or Armenian origin who hold or used to hold Turkish passports – live in western Europe.7 The lion’s share (more than 3 million) live in Germany (Baser 2015). Migration from Turkey to Germany dates back to the bilateral agreements for guest workers in the early 1960s. The first migrations were economically motivated; however with each political turbulence in Turkey—mainly due to military coups—immigrations have occurred one after another. Most visible migrations took place in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s because of increased repression of leftist and Kurdish nationalist groups due to the escalating conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK. In fact, migration from Turkey to Germany was fairly constant for over 50 years, making Germany a hub for Turkish transnational interactions.

A diasporic landscape has been created in Germany: throughout the country Turkey’s political movements have satellite branches where Turkish state actors execute diaspora governance policies for a population that is by now also German, obliging the German state to constantly mitigate between their own demands and those of the Turkish state. Germany is a space of contestation, settlement and struggle; it is a diasporic space where both dissidents and loyalists of the current Turkish regime transport their agendas from the homeland.

In the 1960s Turkey’s engagement with its diaspora was sporadic and consisted primarily of the bureaucratic means required to facilitate remittance flows back to the country and build communication channels for guest workers and their families.

Beginning in the 1980s the diasporic space started to become politicized and Turkish state officials began to pay more attention to migrant organizations with political aims, including leftists, Kurdish nationalists as well as Islamist groups that campaigned against the secular structure of Turkey. However, it was when the AKP came to power that Turkish diasporic policy took a major turn. Following current neo-liberal trends, Turkey formulated a ‘diaspora management policy’, which targeted not only Turkish citizens abroad (and their descendants) but also their kin communities—mainly in the Balkans (Ozturk and Gozaydin 2018) and in Central Asia, among others (Sahin-Mencutek and Baser 2017). The AKP government also

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introduced external voting rights to the diaspora members and this eventually led to the
transnationalization of election campaigns, with both positive and negative consequences
(Mugge et al. 2019; Sevi et al. 2019). Things became especially tense during the referendum
whereby Turkey changed its government regime from parliamentary to presidential (Bilgin
and Erdogan 2018).

However, the latest migration flow dates to early the 2010s when secular Turks, leftists and
Kurdish activists began to leave the country due to an escalation of violence and a reduced
freedom of speech after the Gezi protests (Yanasmayan and Kasli 2019). These new migration
flows not only changed the demographics of Turkish migration to Germany, but also the
balance of power in the diasporic landscapes. Turkey’s diasporic communities were already
heterogeneous and divided; this most recent wave created a new impetus with regard to
activism and changing the balance of power among various groups in the diaspora.
The societal and political polarizations in Turkey are also reflected in their transnational
networks, while migrants in Germany are now forming new alliances, which has led to new
disputes/debates.

Turkey’s domestic tensions and their diffusion to the transnational space have also affected
its diplomatic relations with Europe. A central dynamic here is the interaction between
diasporas and their host countries, such that the debate on dual loyalties has resurfaced and
Turkish migrants’ allegiance to ‘Western values’ has been fiercely questioned, although many
journalists and politicians interpret diaspora support for the AKP as the result of insufficient
(on the part of host countries) integration policies. Moreover, even during the campaign
period, there were clashes with European leaders regarding the AKP’s ‘YES rallies’ that were
organized for Turks living in Europe and attended by Turkish politicians brandishing
incendiary rhetoric. The referendum results and Turkey’s worsening human rights record
exacerbated tensions between Turkey and the West and saw Turkey drift further from EU
membership. This will surely have long-term consequences for Turkey’s diasporas and their
relations with the countries that they live in.

A Closer Look at Turkey’s Diaspora Governance Policy
Turkey’s policy towards its citizens living abroad has evolved over time. Turkey has shown a
growing interest in diaspora governance decade by decade, however the most significant
policy change occurred under the AKP: the party not only established the Presidency for
Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) and the Public Diplomacy Coordinator under

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8 Turkish referendum rallies in Europe made headlines. Did they affect election results?, Washington Post, 6 May 2017.
referendum-rallies-in-europe-made-headlines-did-they-affect-election-results/?noredirect=on

9 The YTB was founded in March 2010. For the law that regulates the scope of its activities see the Official Gazette 27544,
the Prime Ministry, but it also founded the Yunus Emre Institutes to enhance cultural activities abroad. Turkey is not the first country to reform its emigration policies and transform them into a systematic and strategic engagement with its citizens abroad. From Armenia to Bosnia, from China to India, many countries are trying to formulate diasporic policies to benefit their homeland’s interests, especially by engaging with them via certain political processes such as lobbying or external voting. They often create new institutions such as diaspora ministries or sub-committees that operate under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Şahin-Mencüt and Baser 2017). Turkey has always been, in one way or another, engaged in its citizens’ transnational landscapes abroad; what changed under the AKP was the systematic engagement with certain segments while simultaneously isolating dissidents of the regime under the same diaspora policy.

The major break from earlier policies is the distinct change in mentality. The policies formulated by successive AKP governments have used diaspora policy as a nation-branding strategy; in contrast, the political parties previously in power opted for a nation-hiding practice. What do we mean by this? In the past, mainstream political parties in Turkey treated Turkish migrants as a liability. Especially during the time when Turkey’s EU bid was at its peak, immigrants were constantly blamed for Turkey’s poor image in Europe (Ramm 2009). Therefore, government efforts aimed at a positive branding of the Turkish nation in the international arena mostly ignored Turkish migrants—the migrant Turk, who left Turkey for a better future, did not speak well for the country’s image. This has drastically changed during the AKP era.

The AKP did not formulate a diaspora governance mechanism from scratch (Yaldız 2013). On the contrary, it built on and reformed existing policies and institutions, and worked to transform the popular perception of Turkish citizens abroad as a liability to the idea that they were an asset (Şahin-Mencutek and Baser 2017). Every speech made by a politician or YTB bureaucrat has underlined this fact. In line with the current neo-liberal trend of engaging with diasporas and using them as bridges between home and host countries, Turkish authorities have re-embraced their kin and invested significant capital and effort to strengthen ties, not only with those born in Turkey but also with the descendants of first-generation migrants.

Why did the AKP do this? What are the long and short-term repercussions/benefits of these policies for diasporic landscapes? Initially the AKP made efforts to mobilize the diaspora with a holistic approach that simultaneously included social, economic and political agendas. Yet the real transformative motivation came from the AKP’s own vision and future

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10 For more information on Turkey’s Public Diplomacy Coordinator see: https://kdk.gov.tr/.
11 For more information on the Yunus Emre Institutes see: http://www.yee.org.tr/en.
12 We thank Mete Hatay for underlining the nation-branding/nation-hiding dichotomy.
aim for the 'New Turkey' that they wanted to create—a vision that included both domestic and foreign policy dimensions. Indeed, in an article published in 2011, Ibrahim Kalin, the President's spokesperson, said the following:

This [a new geographic imagination emerging in the 21st century] new idea of time and place makes it possible for Turkey to produce its own concepts and build a new vocabulary. From a semiotic perspective, even the new vocabulary and concepts of Turkish politics and foreign policy should be noted as indicators of a profound mental transformation. (Kalin 2011: 6)

The strategy underlying the creation of diaspora management programs was public diplomacy, which also entails soft power and cultural diplomacy elements. By adapting to the needs of the time, but at the same time embracing the nation's roots and customs, the diaspora could be reunited with the homeland. This would clearly show Turkey as a powerful country that could take care of its citizens anytime and anywhere in the world, while reassuring the diaspora that the homeland was always ready to embrace them in whatever way they want to stay connected. They are neither 'remittance machines' nor the 'unemployed masses' that the state sent away in despair; instead, they are part of the Turkish nation—an inseparable component of the very psyche of the Turkish national identity. The AKP's major success in getting mass support in Turkey and beyond was actually this very inclusive discourse, which condemned, and was a huge change from, the previous party discourses they perceived as elitist. In the AKP's vision, re-embracing kin and diaspora would not only make Turkey stronger but would also bring the country prestige in the international arena.

In other words, Kalin claimed, “public diplomacy entails the comprehensive communication of the new ‘Turkish story’ effectively to the world” (2011: 18). However, apart from the social, political and economic benefits that are confined within the borders of public diplomacy, the new corridors connecting the diaspora and the homeland would also serve another purpose. The ‘new Turkish story’ had to be communicated to the international audience as well as to the diaspora Turks. The regime change in Turkey, which happened slowly but surely, needed a narrative that could be appreciated by the domestic population as well as by Turks living abroad. This was/is important for its survival and its ability to counter dissent. For the survival of the new regime in Turkey, nation-branding, therefore, becomes a practice that also, unavoidably, addresses the loyal citizens, who can then become the carriers of that nation's image to broader audiences in a much more complex, legitimate and widespread way. In other words, the new brand needs 'brand ambassadors' and they need to be created before other strategies are put in play. Aronczyk explains this strategy in the following way:

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Kinship and Diasporas in Turkish Foreign Policy

[...] the primary responsibility for the success of the nation brand lies with individuals: the nation’s citizens, members of the diaspora, or even non-citizens in distant locations who may find cause to engage with the nation and therefore wish to have a stake in its success. For national citizens in particular, the key function is to ‘live the brand’—that is, to perform attitudes and behaviors that are compatible with the brand strategy. By ‘immers[ing]’ themselves in the brand identity, citizens carry ‘the microbes of the brand’ and ‘infect’ those with whom they come into contact. This role is described variously as a ‘brand ambassador,’ ‘brand champion,’ ‘brand exemplar,’ or ‘brand carrier.’ (Aronczyk 2008:54)

However, in this day and age where boundaries are blurring and where ideologies and identities can become transnationalised in a matter of seconds, the diasporans are also expected to ‘live the brand.’ The audience for nation-branding strategies is just getting wider and wider. Take the YTB for instance. It focuses on four main areas: a) Overseas citizens, b) Kin and related communities, c) International Students, and d) Non-governmental Organizations. The scope of its activities is much broader than other diaspora ministries that deal with citizens abroad, but it has elements that underline Islam and Turkishness, adopting a broad definition of kin and relative communities. Therefore, the diaspora governance policy became highly lucrative for winning the hearts and minds of a variety of Turkey-related groups who are not necessarily citizens of Turkey.

The vagueness of the term gave Turkish authorities an incredible space to maneuver and tailor policies under the title of diaspora diplomacy, public diplomacy and soft power—and in ways that go far beyond the classical definitions of ‘diaspora’ in the academic literature. The AKP’s commitment to reviving historical ties with former Ottoman territories as well as to strengthening relationships with Muslim communities abroad shaped the diaspora governance policy. The neo-Ottoman ideology that the political party pursued affected how they defined the ‘citizen’ who lives abroad and the individuals who are ‘kin’ to ethnic Turks. Countries included in this category range from Bosnia to Mauritania, from Kyrgyzstan to Tunisia.

It should also be noted that there was a bottom-up demand for the Turkish state’s belated interest in such issues. Many diasporans feel that it was even too late when Turkey began to formulate such policies and believe that it should have stepped in long ago (Sahin-Mencutek and Baser 2017). Diasporans were resentful, and they felt abandoned by the homeland—a sentiment the AKP clearly understood. The YTB’s discourses and activities, especially during the initial stages of the implementation of such policies, clearly show that it has understood the diaspora mentality and has paid close attention to the bottom-up demands.

Because the AKP had done their homework carefully, many diasporans welcomed their policies despite not feeling one hundred percent in line with their ideological stance. Initially, the reforms in transnational state activities—including basic operations at Turkish consulates, voting rights, pensions, facilitating military duty-related bureaucratic matters, social security
and health matters, online appointment system for consulates, etc.— benefited the whole Turkish diaspora, regardless of individuals’ religious, ethnic and ideological affiliation. For instance, before the foundation of the YTB, Turkish citizens living abroad could only vote at ballot boxes set up at customs; they could not vote in their host country. The law changed in 2012 and in 2014 diasporans cast their vote for the first time in their host countries, for the Presidential elections. The extension of democratic rights abroad created a highly positive atmosphere in the Turkish diaspora and perpetuated the AKP’s positive image abroad.

The YTB also prepares regular reports on the situation of Turkish citizens in various European countries and maps the needs of diasporans by focusing on specific pertinent issues such as Islamophobia and xenophobia. The YTB undertook, in Europe as well as in the MENA, the Caucasus and Central Asia, the foundation of various NGOs that aim at promoting Turkish interests, lobbying host country governments and keeping diasporic ties intact. For instance, the Diyanet branch in Germany, Diyanet Isleri Turk Islam Birliği (DITIB), is considered an umbrella NGO, and is reputed to have 896 organizations under its auspices.

One might argue that the diaspora also has an economic value for the AKP governments. However, research shows that the remittances that Turkey receives have actually been declining for the last two decades (See Icduygu 2006; Mugge 2013: 6-7). Rather than relying on remittances, the new policy aims to create transnational business networks among diaspora entrepreneurs and local business owners, with the aim of increasing Turkey’s economic capacity abroad. For instance, at the World Turkish Entrepreneurs Congress, TOBB and DEIK President Rifat Hisarcıklıoğlu said the following:

This force will make us Turbo-Turkey! The time has come for Turkey and the Turkish Diaspora to come together around shared global goals. We have always approached such concepts as lobbying and Diaspora with doubt. We have identified these things as foreign powers acting against us in our country. We weren’t aware of our own Diaspora. Now, as the Turkish Diaspora, we declare “We are here!” We want our successes to herald change, to shape change. Our goal is to be one of the top 10!

The top 10 is the world’s 10 largest country economies. They direct the world. The key to it is a strong economy and the key to that is a strong Diaspora! We will enter the top 10 with our Diaspora! We have set our course. We will design the future together.

14 For more information on Turkey’s external voting experience see Şahin-Mencütek and Erdogan (2016).
15 For other examples on diaspora integration policies see: https://www.ytb.gov.tr/yurtdisi-vatandas-rehberi.
16 As Ozturk (2016) argued, the Diyanet is one of the most pliable state apparatuses that Turkey uses to establish hegemony over Muslims from Turkey and beyond.
18 Ibid.
These economic ambitions also translate into the establishment of Turkish businessmen associations in countries where sizeable Turkish-origin populations live. These organizations not only strengthen ties with local Turkish businessmen, but they also build bridges between host country entrepreneurs and Turkey. Besides economic interests, it is clear that the YTB acts with political motivations: it has agendas that promote state interests and it reflects the mentality of the ruling elite. The main activities of the YTB in this regard include bringing diaspora representatives together with state officials and creating platforms for otherwise scattered communities to create leverage. While the whole institution is structured in a way to acknowledge Turkey’s diaspora and address their needs, at the same time the idea is to tap their capacities to advance the Turkish state’s interests.

**Diffusion of Turkey’s Domestic Politics in Germany: From Public Diplomacy to Extraterritorial Security Measures?**

Turkey’s domestic tensions diffuse to the transnational space in three ways: a) extraterritorial authoritarian measures; b) transnational election campaigns and the conflicts they create; c) accelerating intra-group rivalries, widening already existing cleavages and creating new alliances.

Turkey’s diaspora governance policies reveal who the state deems ‘acceptable citizens’ because it is they who are included in the diaspora narrative as part of the nation. The YTB’s diaspora activities clearly indicate who is to be mobilized and who is to be demobilized in the transnational space. Their activities are very much the mirror image of the AKP and its mentality; and the AKP definitions of ‘enemies of the state’ and ‘friends of the nation’ are diffused to the diaspora discourse. This is not an entirely new jargon. Turkey has always
created such dichotomies and has always cast a shadow over the transnational space when it involves dissident activities. However, during the AKP period, and with increasing undemocratic measures, these tactics became more visible and more frequent, especially after the coup attempt.

Turkey’s domestic politics spread to the transnational space with the first migration flows. Ethnic, sectarian and ideological struggles in Turkey found audiences among diaspora members, and Turkish political movements have established satellite organizations all around Europe to expand their hegemony abroad (Baser 2015). Germany, due to the size of its Turkish migrant communities, became a hub for Turkey’s domestic tensions. Especially during the 1990s, the Turkish–Kurdish conflict was highly visible in the German public sphere due to the discursive and physical contention among these diaspora groups on German soil (Baser 2017). Kurdish transnational activism caused diplomatic tensions between Germany and Turkey when Turkey accused Germany of harbouring terrorists. These simmering tensions between the two countries spiked after the 15 July coup attempt in Turkey because of another politicized movement in the diaspora: the Gulen Movement, which was/is accused of orchestrating the coup.19 Because there is an active purge of Gulenists in Turkey the movement cannot survive within Turkey—it must survive in exile (Watmough and Ozturk 2018). However, this will not be easy. The YTB and the Diyanet have targeted Gulenists abroad via social media as well as actions on the ground, as a clear demonstration of extension of state’s national security concerns abroad (Ozturk and Sozeri 2018).

It is not only the Gulenists who seek shelter in Germany. As Turkey has become increasingly authoritarian and the purge against the Gulenists and other opposition groups has deepened, Germany has emerged as a primary safe haven for many seeking asylum. Many have prolonged their stay illegally to avoid returning to Turkey where they risk an uncertain future. Academics, who are persecuted in Turkey, have sought out Germany as a friendly environment for freedom of speech and thought,20 and intellectuals who feel obliged to flee Turkey also usually choose Germany as a primary destination.21 It is therefore difficult to imagine Germany, a country with more than three million Turkish immigrants, being able to remain untouched by Turkey’s domestic disputes for any prolonged period.

Monitoring and surveillance of dissidents has taken another form under the current conditions: the state has actively subcontracted surveillance and monitoring activities to loyal diaspora members as well as to employees of state-linked institutions such as imams. For instance, the scandalous news about imams spying on oppositional diaspora members (especially the Gulenists) made headlines not only in Germany but in other European

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19 For a detailed analysis on the diasporization of the Gulen movement see Watmough and Ozturk (2018).

20 https://academicsforpeace-germany.org/

countries as well (Winter 2017), many of whom (including Germany) immediately launched investigations into these allegations.\(^{22}\) Claims that a foreign country has been brazenly spying on dual-nationality citizens within their borders has created nothing but headaches for European governments attempting to manage anti-immigrant sentiment and extreme right-wing populist opposition.

Turkey’s international prestige has accordingly come in for a beating, which in the long run will hamper any diaspora organization’s activity—as suspicions will prevail and distrust among different diaspora groups will increase. Additionally, while Germany and other countries have reacted harshly to these spying allegations, many oppositional diaspora members feel unsafe even though they are at a great distance from Turkey.\(^{23}\) Many have concerns about surveillance of their activities by Turkish authorities, having their passports cancelled or being deported to Turkey. This is not an irrational fear: many Turkish citizens who live in the diaspora have been arrested or taken into custody at the airport as soon as they have landed in Turkey—usually for their social media posts. Also, the president of the Alevite associations in Europe was charged with terrorism and had his passport confiscated and a travel ban imposed.\(^{24}\) Many others have had their passports annulled after emergency decrees. Overall it can be seen that in the diaspora governance mechanisms are also used as a transnational state apparatus to punish those who oppose the ruling party’s and President Erdogan’s hegemony and reward those who are loyal to them. Thus, they can also serve as an extra-territorial authoritarian state apparatus to control and contain anti-regime protests and activities (Glasius 2018).

Besides extra-territorial authoritarian measures, the current reforms in diaspora policy have also led to undesired consequences in the European political sphere. Although the AKP aimed to use these strategies as public diplomacy and soft power, they triggered negative feelings among the European public. The consensus is that the policy backfired, but how did this happen? A key dimension of the diaspora engagement strategy of instrumentalizing Turkish citizens abroad as a tool of state policy has been to grant extra-territorial voting rights. Since 2012, the once highly limited voting rights have been extended significantly. Whereas once Turkish citizens abroad who wished to vote had to return home or be bussed to voting booths at border checkpoints, now Turks abroad can vote in their host countries, giving them real, if numerically marginal, electoral clout in Turkish elections (Sahin-Mencutek and Erdogan 2016).


The growing importance of the diaspora vote has attracted the attention of political parties in Turkey, and they have transnationalised their electoral campaigns accordingly: European countries are now important stops in election campaign tours. However, transnational support for the ‘YES’ campaign for regime change in Turkey (April 2017) created a degree of tension in Europe due to the anti-European rhetoric in propaganda speeches by visiting politicians. For example, both President Erdogan and AKP politicians used the discourse of ‘crusaders’ to frame the debate, accused European politicians of being Nazi remnants and constantly highlighted Islamophobia in Europe. Moreover, when the AKP’s referendum campaign gatherings were banned on security grounds, diplomatic tensions erupted between the Netherlands and Turkey.

These tensions actually benefited non-democratic discourses in both Turkey and Europe and hindered minority struggles in both contexts.\textsuperscript{25} The AKP had two choices: It could either adapt an anti-European, populist and nationalist rhetoric to mobilize voters or it could downplay tensions for the sake of the safety and well-being of its citizens abroad. It chose the former option. In a referendum where each side needed just a small margin to win, the diaspora vote became all the more important and the diaspora’s long-term interactions with the host society were sacrificed for the greater gains of the AKP.

However, this does not mean that AKP policies do not have a strong support base in the diaspora. On the contrary, even these agitations with European politicians were appreciated by many diasporans, who had felt undermined in their host countries for many years. The AKP was seen as the saviour and protector of Turkish citizens and their descendants who were often unfairly treated in their host countries, and who suffered discrimination and Islamophobia despite their hard work and economic contributions. Their support for the AKP and the Erdogan was also used as a legitimization strategy in Europe for the AKP’s vision. Popular media outlets such as \textit{The Economist} have described diaspora support for Erdogan as if these people are “seduced” by his speeches.\textsuperscript{26} However, these kinds of approaches, in their focus on the present, actually undermine the root cause of this massive support, and ignore the fact that diaspora members also have agency in their decisions.

\textbf{Table 1: 16 April Referendum Results}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>Number of Registered Voters</th>
<th>Participation Rate</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>63.07%</td>
<td>36.93%</td>
<td>1,429,492</td>
<td>46.22%</td>
</tr>
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\textsuperscript{25} For instance, in the Netherlands Turkey’s diaspora engagement policy caused parliamentary discussions on the limits of home country intervention in diaspora affairs. See: http://gocvakfi.org/hollandadaturkiyediaspora/.

That almost 50% of diasporans who voted were in favour of the presidential system and increasing Erdogan’s powers confused the European public, paving the way for old debates on the failure of Turkish migrants’ integration and the problem of ‘dual loyalties’ to surface (Smith 2007). For many Europeans, the results were taken to mean that more or less half of Turkish migrants on their territory supported an undemocratic regime back home and actually approved limitations on freedom of speech and assembly as well as arbitrary arrests and ill-treatment. These issues unpacked a whole new discussion on ‘undemocratic remittances’ from a European diaspora that was supposed to have internalized ‘European values’ after so many years. Yet in countries such as Germany or Austria the mantra of ‘integration failure’ surfaced again as senior politicians discussed revoking dual citizenship rights. Extreme right-wingers even suggested deporting Turks who voted for the AKP.

In this regard, the German national team footballer Mesut Ozil’s case is an interesting one: a photo taken with President Erdogan received such a huge negative backlash that he was forced to resign from the German national team, underlining that he is still not accepted into German society. Similar examples are found in other European countries. In Sweden for instance, Green Party member, Mehmet Kaplan, had to resign from his political role as Housing Minister after the Swedish media discovered that he was too close to Turkish nationalist diaspora organizations. Moreover, when Turkey’s ‘soft power’ strategy became somewhat ‘blurry’, European media organizations began to follow Turkish state diaspora interventions more closely. The events of 2017, especially, proved that host countries have limits when it comes to absorbing the home-country diaspora governance policies. There seems to be an invisible red line and it seems that Turkey had crossed it. Germany also banned a Turkish diaspora gang called ‘Osmanen Germania’ which was allegedly very close to the AKP, and acted as a strong arm against those opposed to the AKP regime and/or President Erdogan. The DITIB’s activities and Turkish politicians’ visits to open mosques in Germany also caused great tension and German politicians asked organizations such as DITIB to put a clear distance between politics and religion in their affairs.

Scholars have already been pointing to German discontent with publicly pro-Erdogan German-Turks. Wasmer, for instance, stated as far back as 2013 that: ‘Many ordinary Germans watching television coverage of crowds of over 10,000 people waving Turkish flags and applauding Erdogan’s speeches saw this as proof that Turkish immigrants and their

descendants lacked a feeling of belonging to Germany and showed no willingness to integrate in the host society’ (Wasmer 2013: 175). These debates are therefore neither new nor unique to the circumstances surrounding the recent transnational election campaigns. Rather they are signs of a growing hostility in Europe towards the ruling elite in Turkey due to the AKP and President Erdogan’s quite open and explicit anti-democratic stance vis-à-vis the Turkish opposition. Diaspora support for Turkey and its government is thus naturally interpreted to indicate these immigrants’ strong anti-democratic mentality.

Lastly, the diffusion of Turkey’s domestic tensions to Germany is evidenced in intra-group rivalries. Previous tensions between different ethnic, religious and ideological groups in Germany have already been widely studied (Baser 2015; Argun 2003; Massicard 2012; Ostergaard-Nielsen 2003; Eccarius-Kelly 2002; Bruinessen 1998). The authoritarian turn, however, led to a very visible divide between pro-AKP and anti-AKP groups in Germany. The latter is much more fragmented and spontaneous compared to the loyalist groups, which receive money and support from the homeland towards their mobilization. Incidents pointing to spying, informing, and protests/counter-protests have reduced trust between two communities. The current diaspora governance policy benefits loyalist groups to the detriment of others. Turkey is also constantly putting pressure on Germany to limit the non-loyalist groups’ freedom of association and speech (for instance for Kurds and leftist groups). These are actions that reveal how cleavages that originated in Turkey are reflected in the diaspora.

The newest migration outflows also serve to alter the existing dynamics, creating new spaces of contention and collaboration. Recent studies show that ‘Turkish refugees experience solidarity and sympathy from/with some people with a Turkey-related migrant background and their organisations while others are hostile towards them in everyday life’ (Roing 2019). For example, we have observed that the Gulenists who are now in exile are not offered the solidarity that they desire from other dissident groups such as Academics for Peace, leftists, anti-fascist NGOs, Kurds or other opposition party supporters. This is primarily because the above-mentioned groups consider Gulenists as accomplices in the authoritarian turn in Turkey.

The days when Gulenist newspapers, TV channels and civil society organizations all worked to criminalize Kurdish activities and condemned academics’ engagement with peace processes is not such a distant memory. Moreover, German policy-makers and civil society also promote a different discourse, hoping to persuade migrant groups to their way of thinking. Furthermore, we can observe that some diaspora groups are aligning over their discontent with AKP policies. It is too early to tell whether these alliances will hold in the long term; in the past, other such initiatives, e.g., the Democratic United Forces, dissolved after a few disputes among the member community organizations.31 We can also discern a silent clash between the newcomers and the established diaspora members in terms of domination of the transnational spaces.

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Conclusion

Turkey’s diaspora governance policy is a clear example of how diaspora engagement policies can come up against an invisible red line in host countries. Although born of intentions to expand Turkey’s public diplomacy and soft power through diaspora diplomacy, in fact, the strategy for engagement with Turkish citizens and their descendants abroad has put Turkey in European headlines for the wrong reasons. Any google search on a combination of keywords such as Turkey, elections and diaspora will produce results that contain keywords such as tension, spill-over, divided and conflict, among others. Turkey’s diaspora policy also reveals that although normatively diaspora engagement policies expand democratic rights to wider populations, such policies can also be instrumentalized to favor certain segments in the diaspora while disfavoring the others. Disfavoring, in this case however, not only means disadvantaging but also means control, monitoring and surveillance. One thing is clear, during the last ten years, the diaspora governance related actions, despite their top-down nature, have had significant impacts on diasporans’ everyday lives one way or another.

In addition to what has already been happening in the diasporic space, new migration flows keep coming from Turkey to Germany and other European countries due to the democratic decline and economic uncertainties in Turkey. The new migration flows bring new dynamics and it is too early to predict how they will change Turkey’s diasporic landscapes in the long term. More research is needed in terms of understanding the real impact of the authoritarian turn on diasporans’ everyday lives, the relationships between the established diaspora and the newcomers as well as the host country responses to these drastic changes.

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